

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 16, 2020

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor
Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis:

We bring your attention to a serious failure of Florida's unemployment benefits in regards to workers with partial unemployment and request your immediate attention to these issues.

In Florida, like most of the country, we have seen massive unemployment and reduced work hours. Most who go totally unemployed are eligible for some type of state and/or federal unemployment benefits. However, most who are partially unemployed with reduced work hours are getting no assistance. This is not only unfair but incentivizes unemployment over partial employment.

This is especially affecting the thousands of workers in the hospitality and services industry and essential workers like nurses, bus drivers, and custodians who have lost hours as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and are making less money than they would on full unemployment.

Under current Florida law, if a worker with reduced hours is making less than \$333 per week (a formula based amount) they may receive a pro-rated amount of the state benefit as well as an additional \$600 provided under the *CARES Act*. The \$333 per week amount has been determined by adding one day of state minimum wage of \$58 (called the "disregard" amount) to the state weekly unemployment benefit of \$275.

However, if an individual is making more than this threshold, they are ineligible for state partial unemployment and will not receive any additional federal unemployment benefits unless their employer has entered into the Short Time Compensation program. (Unfortunately it seems that this program is unknown and unused by most businesses and has its own shortfalls that must be corrected as explained further down in this letter.)

To fix the partial unemployment issue for most workers whose employers are not participating in the Short Time Compensation Program we believe there are two possible solutions, one which has no cost to our state.

1. Increase the maximum state unemployment benefit amount – as previously requested to at least \$550 (commensurate with other states with similar costs of living). This would increase the weekly salary cap for receiving partial benefits to roughly \$600 per week thus allowing more workers whose hours have been reduced due to COVID-19 to still access unemployment benefits. And/or

2. Increase the amount Florida will “disregard” in the partial unemployment compensation calculation from \$58 to \$300, as other states like Georgia have done, which would similarly raise the income cap for receiving partial unemployment to roughly \$600 per week. Under the Cares Act, the federal government will pay for the additional federal benefits workers are entitled to.

As you may know, the federal government also took a critical step to help workers whose employers participate in the Short Time Compensation (STC) program. During the COVID-19 pandemic these benefits are also fully paid for by the federal government. To help those under employed workers, you should take swift action to:

1. Provide guidance to employers on how they can apply for access to the STC program;
2. Increase the threshold for the STC program in Florida from 40% to 60% as authorized by federal work-share law so that workers whose hours have been reduced can receive up to 60% of the state’s unemployment benefits; and
3. Provide data on how the STC program is currently being utilized to more effectively conduct outreach to employers.

Thank you for your attention to these issues. Our offices stand ready to support these efforts.

Sincerely,



LOIS FRANKEL
Member of Congress

/s/

KATHY CASTOR
Member of Congress

CHARLIE CRIST
Member of Congress

VAL B. DEMINGS
Member of Congress

TED DEUTCH
Member of Congress

ALCEE L. HASTINGS
Member of Congress

AL LAWSON, JR.
Member of Congress

DEBBIE MUCARSEL-POWELL
Member of Congress

STEPHANIE MURPHY
Member of Congress

DONNA SHALALA
Member of Congress

DARREN SOTO
Member of Congress

DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ
Member of Congress

FREDERICA WILSON
Member of Congress

CC:

Jonathan R. Satter
Secretary
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity